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Overall progress achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Promoting education, public awareness and training*

(Chapter 36 of Agenda 21)

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION		1 - 3	2
I.	KEY OBJECTIVES	4 - 5	2
II.	REPORTING AND ANALYSING SUCCESSES	6 - 13	3
III.	PROMISING CHANGES	14 - 26	5
IV.	UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS	27 - 33	8
V.	EMERGING PRIORITIES	34 - 37	9

*The present report was prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as task manger for chapter 36 of Agenda 21, in accordance with arrangements agreed to by the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD). It is the result of consultation and information exchange between United Nations agencies, international and national organizations, interested government agencies and a range of other institutions, individuals and major group representatives.

INTRODUCTION

1. The present report reviews progress made in the implementation of chapter 36 of Agenda 21 (Promoting education, public awareness and training),1/ taking into account the decisions taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development on this subject in 1996 at its fourth session.

2. Chapter 36 is a cross-sectoral chapter of Agenda 21. Since 1992, this chapter has continued to enjoy unanimous support from Governments, major groups and the educational community of both developed and developing countries, as it had in Rio. Education is considered indispensable for sustainable development and for increasing the capacity of people to address environment and development issues. The implementation of chapter 36 is therefore seen to influence progress in the implementation of all the other chapters of Agenda 21.

3. Recommendations concerning education also appear in each of the action plans of the major United Nations conferences held after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development as well as in the three conventions (on biodiversity, climate change and desertification). For this reason, education can be seen as the cornerstone of sustainable development in all its dimensions. Science education can be considered to be a major component of environmental education and education for sustainable development. Further reference to the importance of enhancing science education is to be found in the report of the Secretary-General on chapter 35 of Agenda 21 (Science for sustainable development) (E/CN.17/1997/2/Add.25).

I. KEY OBJECTIVES

4. Guided by the priorities and programme areas identified in chapter 36 of Agenda 21, and reconfirmed by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session in 1996, three main objectives need to be addressed:

(a) To reorient education towards sustainable development through reform of education as a whole rather than through adjustment or adding on of separate new components to existing curricula;

(b) To increase public awareness as public support and action are increasingly seen as the key to change;

(c) To promote training in order to ensure the necessary competence and human resources for planning and implementing sustainable development in sectors of human activity.

5. The last objective, training, is dealt with in this report only in so far as it concerns action in regard to the first two objectives. The wider issue of higher education is addressed in the report of the Secretary-General on chapter 35. Other areas of training are dealt with in the report on chapter 37 (E/CN.17/1997/2/Add.27) as well as in all reports concerning the implementation of the different topical chapters of Agenda 21.

II. REPORTING AND ANALYSING SUCCESSES

6. The five years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development have witnessed significant progress in each of the broad programme areas of chapter 36. The rapid expansion of access to communication technologies, the development of new technologies, the increasing impact of the mass media, globalization and the evolution of the "information society" have all impacted on the concerns of chapter 36. Progress has also been made in basic education, which remains a priority for many countries of the world, linked to the overall effort to combat poverty.

7. While many individual examples could be cited, emphasis is placed in this report on the single most important success since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development: the decision by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session to initiate a special work programme on chapter 36.2/ This decision has served to:

(a) Raise visibility on a subject that, while recognized as essential by all, is often overlooked for lack of controversy or funding;

(b) Demonstrate that Governments understand that education is a fundamental priority and one needing special impetus in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development follow-up;

(c) Clarify the strategic priorities for action in the vast scope of the chapter;

(d) Galvanize the key actors within a common framework for priority action.

8. An inter-sessional workshop on the theme "Education and public awareness for sustainable development" (Prague, November/December 1995), organized by the Czech Republic in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, provided key input into the development of this work programme.

9. The vision of education inscribed in chapter 36 has been reaffirmed, broadened and deepened within the new international consensus and framework for action emerging from the series of international conferences organized by the United Nations after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Explicit recommendations concerning "education, public awareness and training" appear in the action plans for each of the conferences, as well as in the Cor ention on Biological Diversity,3/ the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change4/ and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa.5/ An important development since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development has been, therefore, the consistent importance given to education and the concomitant need to integrate the implementation of chapter 36 with the implementation of analogous recommendations within the other action frameworks. This integrated approach was emphasized by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session during its review of chapter 36 and is reflected in the work programme.

10. Within the United Nations system, the integrated follow-up to the major conferences is being pursued in part through the convening under the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) of three inter-agency task forces. Of particular relevance to chapter 36 is the inter-agency Task Force on Basic Social Services for All, within which there is a working group on basic education chaired by UNESCO. The work of this task force will culminate in the identification of indicators, in order to facilitate integration at national level in both thematic and operational terms, as well as new guidelines for United Nations resident coordinators to ensure improved help from the United Nations system in this respect.

11. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, a number of events and studies have taken place that provide an overview and evaluation of the status of environmental and development education. Particular attention is drawn to the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors and established by UNESCO. In its report on education for the twenty-first century,6/ submitted to the General Conference of UNESCO in 1995, the Commission formulated recommendations for enhancing and reviewing education, as well as for reform of the formal education system. The work of the International Commission incorporated education for sustainable development and therefore provided the broad context for implementation of chapter 36.

12. At national level, a number of countries have included education, public awareness and training in national strategies or plans for sustainable development. During this planning process, interested parties and potential actors from different sectors of society have been mobilized. Certain countries are now moving towards reviewing school curricula or otherwise taking concrete action. In many countries, the development of education for sustainable development coincides with overall reform of formal educational systems.

13. National policies and strategies have been spurred by regional meetings including some organized by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and UNESCO and agreements at intergovernmental or expert level which have reiterated the importance of, and recommended action concerning, education for sustainable development. Those meetings include:

(a) The Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean, Kingston, Jamaica, 13-17 May 1996;

(b) The Mid-decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, Amman, 16-19 June 1996;

(c) The International Conference on Education, forty-fifth session, Geneva, 30 September-5 October 1996;

(d) The Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, December 1996;

(e) Preparations for the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), Hamburg, 14-18 July 1997.

III. PROMISING CHANGES

14. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, there has been a significant evolution - both conceptual and operational - with regard to education, public awareness and training, which are increasingly being called "education for sustainable development".

15. Since 1992, the process of rethinking education and public awareness has accelerated, spurred by other major United Nations conferences on sustainable development, and by the experience acquired by Governments, business and industry as they begin to further changes towards sustainability. Experience since Rio has reinforced the conviction that sustainable development cannot be achieved without public understanding, support and action. Education is understood, more than ever, as necessary to support advances in nearly all sectors, including production, technology, population, advancement of women, management of human settlements, health, peace and security. The view that chapter 36 is relevant to the implementation of all other chapters of Agenda 21 is thus even stronger today than it was in 1992.

16. In this new vision, education is seen no longer as an end in itself, but as a means to:

(a) Effect the changes in values, behaviour and lifestyles that are needed to achieve sustainable development, and ultimately democracy, human security and peace;

(b) Disseminate the knowledge, know-how and skills that are needed to bring about sustainable production and consumption patterns and to improve the management of natural resources, agriculture, energy and industrial production;

(c) Ensure an informed public that is prepared to support changes towards sustainability emerging from different sectors.

17. The implications of this new vision of education for formal education systems are major, and coincide with a broad rethinking within many countries of formal education systems that are no longer considered adequate to meeting the needs of society and the workplace. Traditionally, education has been designed largely to pass on existing knowledge, skills and values. Today, education is being redesigned in terms of how to prepare people for life: for job security; for the demands of a rapidly changing society; for technological changes that now directly or indirectly affect every part of life; and, ultimately, for the quest for happiness, well-being and quality of life. Education is being redefined as a lifelong process that needs to be not merely readjusted but restructured and reformed according to new requirements. One of the requirements for the future is that of sustainability, an overarching concept that has broad implications for curricula at all levels of education.

18. Much progress is being made, particularly within the last year, in clarifying the concept and key messages of the still emerging notion of "education for sustainable development", not least of which is the recognition that there is an urgent need to develop a new conceptual framework for action.

19. Within the new work programme on chapter 36, the Commission on Sustainable Development has asked that the concept and key messages be clarified. To this end, UNESCO, as task manager, has begun a process of consultation with educators, during which the initial concept is being tested and refined with the professional community. At the annual meeting of the North American Association for Environmental Education (San Francisco, November 1996), professionals from over 50 countries were engaged in this dialogue. Similarly, at the Second Scientific Forum on Environment of the Association of Universities Group Montevideo (AUGM), specialists from 27 universities in Latin America were consulted. Analogous events will take place in 1997 in the Asian region, as well as in Europe. UNESCO is also working towards the organization in 1997 of an international meeting on education for sustainable development to be held possibly in Greece, 20 years after the landmark Tbilisi conference which set the basic guidelines for the development of environmental education. The meeting in Greece should be an important step in building consensus on the concept and key messages of education for sustainable development.

20. Within UNESCO, new arrangements were set in place immediately after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and in anticipation of the other conferences to be held, in order to mobilize UNESCO's resources to follow up the conferences in terms of education and information. A new transdisciplinary and inter-agency cooperation project on "Environment and population, education and information for development (EPD)" was launched in 1994. Initiatives are also being taken, both by UNESCO and by individual countries, with respect to teacher training. A short course will be made available on video in 1997, to be tested and refined at an international workshop to be held in Vancouver, Canada, in August 1997. This meeting will also be used as a forum to consolidate an international network of teacher training institutions that is being developed under the aegis of UNESCO to draft guidelines for reorienting teacher training towards sustainable development at primary and secondary levels.

21. New curricula and teaching materials are being developed. The World Health Organization (WHO) has produced a textbook and teaching kit on basic environmental health for university level. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is developing agro-ecological curriculum materials. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) is using a 13-volume series entitled "Training for Local Leadership" targeted to local civic leaders.

22. Building on the experience of the former joint UNESCO-United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) International Environmental Education Programme (IEEP) which came to an end in 1995, the United Nations system and other international organizations with UNESCO as task manager are now working to develop a new international alliance so as to further the broader notion of education for sustainable development, as called for by the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme. The primary thrust of action since the fourth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development has been:

(a) To continue discussions within the United Nations system to develop a broad cooperative framework for action that would be bold and imaginative and would concentrate on a limited number of key undertakings during the next four

to five years, which would allow for participation from outside the United Nations system;

(b) To publicize the new Commission on Sustainable Development work programme within the United Nations system, as well as among non-governmental organizations, the educational community, the private sector and other stakeholders, and to seek input and ideas for further development of the work programme and for use by UNESCO as task manager for the purpose of reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development. To this end, a joint UNESCO-IUCN meeting on education and public awareness for sustainable development was held in Montreal in October 1996 in conjunction with the IUCN World Conservation Congress;

(c) To broaden participation in and create partnerships among relevant bodies of the United Nations system, Governments and major groups, in particular non-governmental organizations, business and industry, youth, and the educational community.

23. The Commission on Sustainable Development also called for the mobilization and broadening of networks to deliver education, public awareness and training, particularly at the grass-roots level. There has been significant progress since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development although much work remains to be done to tap the full range of potential actors. Since 1992, emphasis has been placed on either reinforcing or introducing educational concerns into existing networks related to sustainable development. Examples include more than 30 UNESCO Chairs for Sustainable Development, networks of professional educators and scientists involved in UNESCO's major science programmes, and the network of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communications. In 1997, UNESCO plans to undertake an inventory of key networks that could contribute to the new, broader vision of education in terms of sustainability, so that the diffusion of information and the exchange of ideas and experience can be improved. During the last two years, FAO has been working with a network of training institutions to integrate environmental education training into agricultural extension training systems and programmes.

24. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, action to implement Agenda 21 has been targeted increasingly towards the municipality and community level, whereas national Governments are concerned more with developing policy frameworks and incentives. It is at the local level that people are most easily motivated and mobilized to take action towards solving the concrete problems that affect their daily lives. It is thus particularly at the local level that new partnerships among the different stakeholders are coalescing, often through local Agenda 21 action plans. Public awareness-raising is particularly important in this context, with the household being a key point of entry.

25. Partnerships with youth are particularly effective at this level, an example being work initiated on the basis of the book Rescue Mission: Planet Earth,7/ a youth version of Agenda 21 sponsored by Peace child International, UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNEP. In Canada, youth groups developed a special action guide tailored to local conditions that has been distributed to every

school and mayor in the country in order to mobilize youth to take personal responsibility for implementing Agenda 21.

26. Numerous local and international non-governmental organizations are particularly active in the field of education. In fact, in many countries non-governmental organizations have proved to be key actors in disseminating information and developing materials at the local level. In this respect, UNEP initiated in 1996 a "Global Environmental Citizenship Programme" aimed in particular at mobilizing non-governmental organizations and media support for promoting attitudinal and behavioural changes. In the initial consultations between UNESCO, UNEP and IUCN on developing a broad international alliance for education for sustainable development, the crucial role of non-governmental organizations and other major groups was stressed. These groups will be fully involved in implementing the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme.

IV. UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS

27. The scope and complexity of chapter 36 was, until the adoption of a work programme by the Commission on Sustainable Development, in itself an impediment to implementation. While the work programme is now focusing efforts on a few agreed-upon priorities, the wide range of objectives, target groups, key actors and stakeholders remain daunting.

28. Education for sustainable development is still an emerging concept that requires further clarification and consensus. Of particular concern to many is its relationship to the concept of environmental education which emerged after the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 and focused primarily on the environment and its protection. Environmental education is now seen as an important part of education for sustainable development but not as its equivalent.

29. The challenge is to integrate the concepts of human development, social development and economic development with environmental protection in a holistic, interdisciplinary conceptual framework. The task is therefore far broader and deeper than the "conversion" of environmental education towards sustainable development advocated in chapter 36, and will necessarily involve all the disciplines and, for formal education, virtually all parts of the school curricula.

30. The gap between science and education compounds the difficulty of clarifying the content of education for sustainable development, which needs to be based on interdisciplinary, accurate, up-to-date and unbiased information. Such information is, however, slow to move from the realm of academics and experts to that of the non-specialist users of such information.

31. The integration of sustainable development concerns into formal education systems is also hampered by a lack of the kind of planners, teachers and administrators who are trained in interdisciplinary approaches in general and in environment and development issues in particular.

32. Formal education systems will best be able to contribute towards sustainable development through restructuring and reform, coupled with pre- and in-service teacher training. The time required for such change needs to be taken into account, however, together with the budget restrictions prevalent in most countries.

33. The political will needed to successfully reorient education, public awareness and training towards sustainable development is still lacking. Although there has been greater understanding of the fundamental importance of education since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, this recognition has not been translated into the necessary financial investments. Putting money into education needs to be understood in a long-term perspective, as an investment in providing, over time, the essential underpinning of public support and therefore public action without which the world cannot achieve sustainability. If the necessary financing is not forthcoming, chapter 36 risks becoming the forgotten priority of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

V. EMERGING PRIORITIES

34. The decision of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session to initiate a special work programme on chapter 36 has been a landmark with respect to education, public awareness and training. This work programme reflects a consensus on the priorities for future action that have emerged since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, namely:

(a) Developing a broad international alliance and promoting networks;

(b) Integrating implementation of chapter 36 with analogous recommendations in the action plans of the major United Nations conferences and conventions;

(c) Advising on how education and training can be integrated into national educational policies;

(d) Refining the concept and key messages of education for sustainable development;

(e) Advancing education and training at national level;

(f) Providing financial and technical support to the developing countries;

(g) Developing new partnership arrangements exploiting the communications technologies;

(h) Working in partnership with youth;

(i) Analysing current investments in education;

(j) Making the relevant linkages with the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme on changing production and consumption patterns.

35. These priorities have emerged after a period of both conceptual and operational ferment in terms of understanding the profound role of education in achieving sustainability. The work programme provides a much-needed focus for action for a chapter that is extremely wide-ranging and complex, and touches on virtually all other chapters of Agenda 21.

36. The work programme initiated by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session is still only a framework, or skeleton, that needs to be developed in greater detail. While efforts in this direction have started, the fact that the implications of the work programme are far-reaching still needs to be recognized. The changes called for - reforming educational systems, rethinking the outcomes of education, developing an interdisciplinary conceptual framework that reflects the complexity of the notion of sustainable development, agreeing on the key messages, changing attitude, lifestyles, and so on - will require time and the concerted effort and support of all sectors of society.

37. In order to continue in this direction, what is needed are:

(a) Endorsement of the preliminary steps that are being taken to implement the work programme, as outlined in this report;

(b) Continued priority being given by the Commission on Sustainable Development to education, public awareness and training in its future work;

(c) A fully developed work programme for consideration by the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(d) Assigning of priority to the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme within the United Nations system, and in particular by UNESCO as task manager for chapter 36;

(e) Initiatives by Governments and major groups to further develop the work programme, with the cooperation of the United Nations system, as appropriate;

(f) Enhanced financing and investment in education for sustainable development.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

2/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 8 (E/1996/28), chap. I, Sect. C, decision 4/11, para. 2.

3/ United Nations Environment Programme, Convention on Biological Diversity (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

4/ A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

5/ A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II.

6/ Learning: the Treasure Within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Paris, UNESCO, 1996).

7/ Kingfisher Books, 1995. Available from United Nations publications.